
KING COUNTY
OFFICE OF CITIZEN COMPLAINTS
TRIENNIAL REPORT
JANUARY – APRIL 2004

Presented to the
Metropolitan King County Council

May 15, 2004

Amy Calderwood, Ombudsman-Director
Arlene Sanvictores, Assistant Ombudsman III
Colleen Albrecht, Assistant Ombudsman II
Steve Birge, Office Manager
Matthew Conquergood, Legislative Secretary
Rowena Dutton, Assistant Tax Advisor II
Marietta Zintak, Assistant Tax Advisor II
Hien Luong, Legislative Secretary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	3
OMBUDSMAN STATISTICS.....	4-6
INVESTIGATIONS.....	7-8
TAX ADVISOR STATISTICS	9-11

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Citizen Complaints is required by code to report to the Metropolitan King County Council on the 15th of January, May, and September of each year on the activities of the Office for the preceding calendar period [KCC 2.52.150]. This report summarizes Office activities for January 1 through April 30, 2004.

During the report period, the Office of Citizen Complaints received 478 inquiries. The majority of contacts to the Office were handled through information and assistance. We initiated 48 complaint investigations, and completed 16 investigations.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Citizen Complaints – Ombudsman investigates complaints about the administrative conduct of King County executive branch agencies. In addition, the Ombudsman investigates alleged violations of the King County Employee Code of Ethics as well as reports of improper governmental action and retaliation under the Whistleblower Protection Code.

The mission of the Office is to promote public confidence in King County government by responding to citizen complaints in an impartial, efficient and timely manner, and to contribute to the improved operation of County government by making recommendations based upon the results of complaint investigations.

INQUIRY CLASSIFICATIONS

The Office of Citizen Complaints classifies citizen inquiries into three categories:

Information: Request for information or advice which may result in referral.

Assistance: Complaint resolved through staff-level inquiry and facilitation.

Investigation: Complaint is not resolvable through assistance, or is potentially systemic. Following preliminary review, complaint is summarized and transmitted to department director for response.

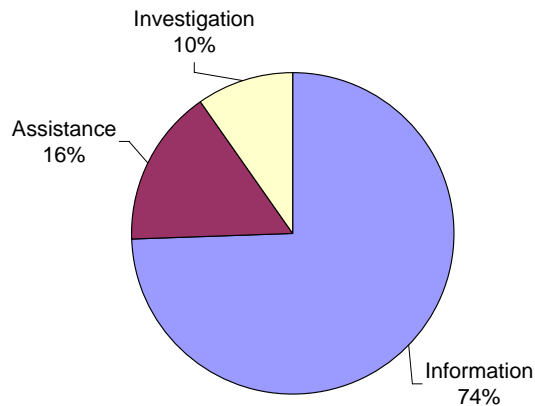
Investigations seek to determine if the complaint was supported or unsupported, and to resolve the problem. Investigations may result in recommendations to departments for improved practices or policy changes. Investigations are closed with a finding of resolved, supported, unsupported, or discontinued.

OMBUDSMAN STATISTICS

Table A
Total Inquiries Received
January – April 2004

Department	Information	Assistance	Investigation	Total
Adult and Juvenile Detention	58	16	19	93
Assessor	4	0	0	4
Boards and Commissions	2	0	0	2
Community and Human Services	6	0	0	6
Development and Environmental Services	13	4	9	26
District Court	20	5	0	25
Executive	1	0	0	1
Executive Services	35	5	5	45
Judicial Administration	3	0	0	3
Metropolitan King County Council	13	7	0	20
Natural Resources and Parks	5	2	2	9
Prosecuting Attorney's Office	5	0	0	5
Public Health	12	24	8	44
Sheriff's Office	19	4	4	27
Superior Court	7	0	0	7
Transportation	10	5	1	16
Non-jurisdictional ¹	142	3	0	145
Total	355	75	48	478

Chart A
Disposition of Total Inquiries Received
January – April 2004



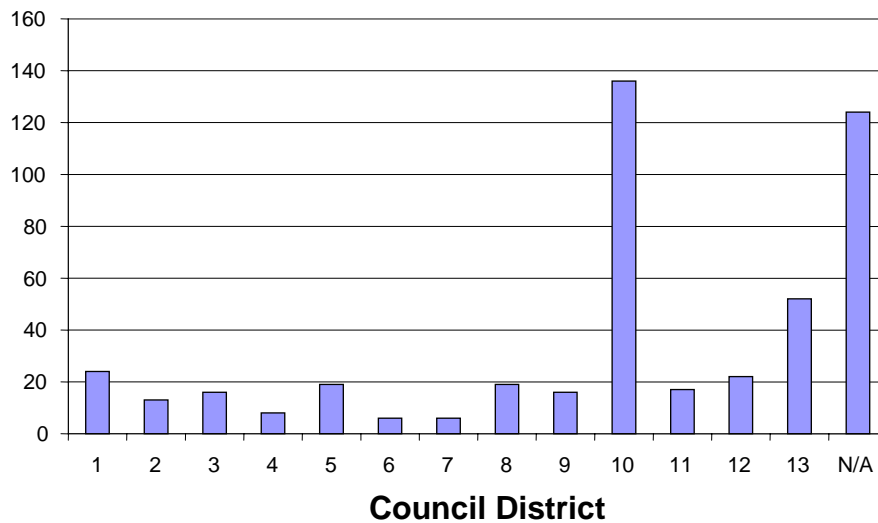
¹ The non-jurisdictional category represents contacts from non-jurisdictional city, state, federal, non-profit, or other private entities

OMBUDSMAN STATISTICS

Table B
Inquiries by Council District
January – April 2004

District	Councilmember	Inquiries
1	Carolyn Edmonds	24
2	Bob Ferguson	13
3	Kathy Lambert	16
4	Larry Phillips	8
5	Dwight Pelz	19
6	Rob McKenna	6
7	Pete von Reichbauer	6
8	Dow Constantine	19
9	Steve Hammond	16
10	Larry Gossett	136 ²
11	Jane Hague	17
12	David Irons	22
13	Julia Patterson	52 ³
N/A	Unavailable	124
Total		478

Chart B
Inquiries by Council District
January – April 2004
N = 478



² Inquiries for this district may be higher due to the number of calls from the Seattle Jail Facility.

³ Inquiries for this district may be higher due to the number of calls from the Regional Justice Center.

COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND JUVENILE DETENTION

Synopsis	Disposition
Complainant alleges excessive force and threats by Corrections Officers, being denied medical treatment, having telephone calls illegally blocked and being unfairly housed in maximum security.	Discontinued. Complainant was advised that witnesses provided were unable to be reached to verify allegations of excessive force and threats; medical records document that complainant was seen and treated; instructions were offered to address blocked telephone calls; and placement in maximum security was the result of disciplinary action.
Complainant alleges excessive force and verbal abuse by a Corrections Officer.	Discontinued. Complainant has been released from jail, did not respond to requests for additional information, and health records do not indicate there were any injuries consistent with the use of excessive force.

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Synopsis	Disposition
Department does not have record of home's certificate of occupancy that complainant maintains was issued approximately 14 years ago. Purchaser of home has alleged that complainant sold home that County had not approved for occupancy.	Partially resolved. There was no record with DDES of a final inspection and approved occupancy. There was a 1990 corrections notice stating "no occupancy until re-inspected and OK'd." Final approval will be granted when corrections items are completed.
Complainant alleges county regulations were applied in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner, and that department unfairly denied a building permit for seven years although site was in compliance with all regulations.	Discontinued. During the course of our investigation the complainant was advised by the department to submit a fee waiver for review and possible action and to contact our office again if not satisfied with the response.
Complainant alleges department did not adhere to guidelines set forth in code; did not approve application within the required 120 days; imposed unduly burdensome requirements; did not advise complainant of delays; did not recognize a 1981 road access and short subdivision approval; and charged excessive fees.	Unsupported. Complainant was advised that a review of the investigation and response provided by the Hearing Examiner adequately addressed the issues raised in the complaint and provided notice on the complainant's right to appeal to Superior Court.

DEPARTMENT OF EXECUTIVE SERVICES

Synopsis	Disposition
Alleges consultant failed to file consultant disclosure form in violation of ethics code (KCC 3.04.120).	Declined. Settlement between complainant and county (complainant's former employer) prevents complaint related to complainant's former employment.
Alleges inappropriate behavior by ITS staff toward consultant for Institutional Network (I-Net) program.	Discontinued. Complainant withdrew complaint.
Complainant alleges being required to repay a salary overpayment that resulted from a clerical error. Alleges that another employee in similar situation was not required to repay county.	Unsupported. Complainant was advised that the code and case law are very specific that accidental overpayment of wages are required to be paid back.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Synopsis	Disposition
Alleges use of county resources for opposition of ballot measure in violation of ethics code (KCC 3.04.020(E)).	Unsupported. Use was consistent with the normal and regular conduct of respondent's official duties. No reasonable cause to believe respondent violated ethics code.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Synopsis	Disposition
Complainant alleges that management is requiring that plumbing inspectors to sign off on plumbing jobs that are incomplete or improperly completed.	Declined. Complainant was advised that the department is hiring outside investigator to investigate allegations in response to whistleblower complaint in which same allegations were presented.
Alleges inordinate delays prior to approval of water supply may affect complainants' eligibility for a loan if house is not constructed by April 2004. Requests that approval of septic design be expedited.	Resolved. After reviewing history of complainant's application, department acknowledged that application process had undergone some unusual situations, and accommodated complainant to simplify and complete necessary financial work.

OFFICE OF CITIZEN COMPLAINTS TRIANNUAL REPORT
JANUARY - APRIL 2004

Synopsis	Disposition
Complainant alleges being threatened by a dentist during dental procedure.	Unsupported. Complainant was advised that witnesses stated that the dentist acted appropriately in cautioning, not threatening, the complainant to hold still during dental procedure.
Alleges Jail Health Services staff member abused intent of anti-harassment order against complainant, and used a jail computer to gain unauthorized access to complainant's criminal history.	Unsupported. Investigation revealed no violation of any laws or jail policy and/or procedures.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Synopsis	Disposition
Alleges use of county resources for opposition of ballot measure in violation of ethics code (KCC 3.04.020(E)).	Unsupported. Use was consistent with the normal and regular conduct of respondent's official duties. No reasonable cause to believe respondent violated ethics code.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Synopsis	Disposition
Complainant alleges that Road Services Division is being arbitrary and unreasonable in not approving the existing road work originally approved by DDES and releasing the bond; RSD has an unwritten zero crack policy; and that a road specification is incorrectly written and not equally enforced.	Unsupported. Complainant was advised that all allegations are unsupported as all projects have management oversight and other projects must also meet similar requirements; concrete cracks were allowed on this project and are similar to requirements of other projects and local municipalities; and the joint specifications wording has been reviewed and approved by legal counsel and is subject to clarification if contractors wish to call the county.
Complainant alleges being threatened with termination as retaliation for reporting supervisor's unethical actions.	Resolved. Complaint was forwarded to department director in accordance with KCC 3.42.060(B).

TAX ADVISOR STATISTICS

The Tax Advisor Office was created in 1971 to provide advice and assistance to any person responsible for the payment of property taxes in King County. In 1993, the Tax Advisor Office became a division of the Office of Citizen Complaints. Tax Advisor staff respond to citizen inquiries regarding the valuation of property, local and state appeal processes, and the property tax computation and collection process.

Table E
Total Tax Advisor Contacts
January – April 2004

Tax Advisor Contacts	
January	524
February	1195
March	1173
April	1444
Total	4,336

SALES SURVEYS

Sales surveys are produced using the Assessor's CompSales program to search for similar property characteristics. The Office reviews two years of previous sales in the plat or sub-area and a sales price range. The search is refined by property characteristics such as view, waterfront, year-built, grade, and condition. A sales report is generated which provides the characteristics and sale prices of similar properties.

Sales surveys are useful in helping taxpayers to determine whether to appeal the Assessor's valuation, and can also be used as evidence when presenting an appeal to the Board of Equalization.

Table F
Sales Surveys
January – April 2004

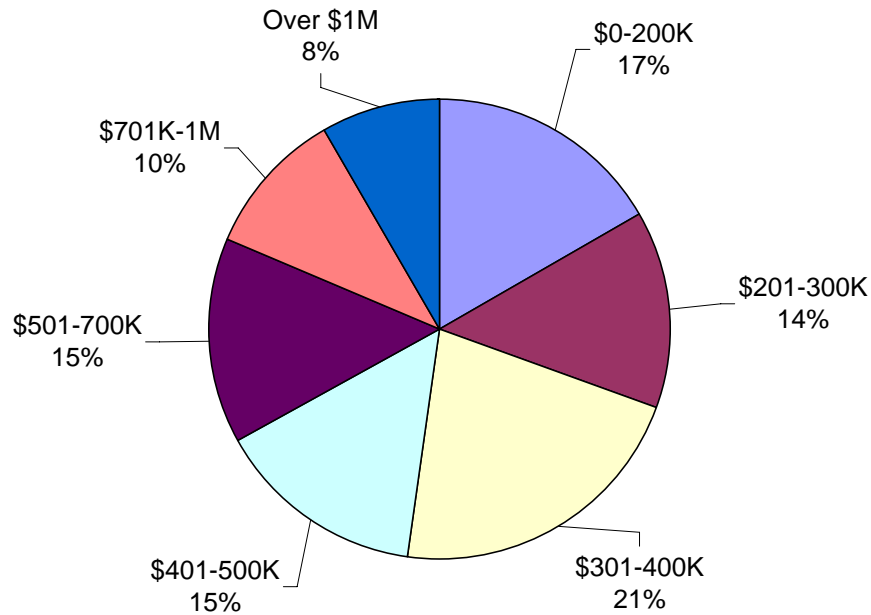
Sales Surveys	
January	9
February	62
March	58
April	62
Total	191

TAX ADVISOR STATISTICS

Table G
Sales Surveys – Assessed Property Value
January – April 2004

Assessed Property Value	Sales Surveys
\$0-200K	32
\$201-300K	27
\$301-400K	42
\$401-500K	28
\$501-700K	28
\$701K-1M	20
Over \$1M	16
Total	193

Chart E
Sales Surveys – Assessed Property Value
January – April 2004



TAX ADVISOR STATISTICS

Table F
Tax Advisor Inquiries by Council District
January – April 2004

District	Councilmember	Inquiries
1	Carolyn Edmonds	379
2	Bob Ferguson	248
3	Kathy Lambert	381
4	Larry Phillips	302
5	Dwight Pelz	463
6	Rob McKenna	291
7	Pete von Reichbauer	106
8	Dow Constantine	368
9	Steve Hammond	237
10	Larry Gossett	269
11	Jane Hague	281
12	David Irons	332
13	Julia Patterson	382
N/A	Unavailable	269
Total		4308

Chart D
Inquiries by Council District
January – April 2004
N=4308

